UNITED NATIONS **S**

Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1999/157
16 February 1999

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

LETTER DATED 16 FEBRUARY 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have been instructed to forward to you the attached statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea entitled "Ethiopia's rejection of an arms embargo" issued today, 16 February 1999 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the text of the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea
issued on 16 February 1999 in Asmara

In its official statement yesterday (15 February 1999), Ethiopia accused the United Nations Security Council of having "double standards" and of "rewarding Eritrea's dangerous gamble". The reason that has apparently aroused the regime's irrational fury is paragraph 7 of Security Council resolution 1227 (1999) of 10 February 1999, which strongly urges all States to end immediately all sales of arms and munitions to Ethiopia and Eritrea.

As it may be recalled, the Government of Eritrea has argued strongly that an isolated arms embargo on Ethiopia and Eritrea - desirable as this might be in the context of the current conflict - will only lead to a dangerous imbalance if it is not applied simultaneously to States in the area whose agenda of regional destabilization is well-known.

But Ethiopia's protest does not emanate from such cogent considerations. Leaving aside the abusive language with which the Ethiopian regime has couched its case, why is Addis Ababa so averse to balanced arms control?

The Ethiopian regime opposes an arms embargo because it has an insatiable desire to occupy Eritrean territory by force. To achieve this, it believes that it must purchase weapons which will give it superiority. It has spent around 400 million dollars in a weapons shopping spree in the past eight months. But it wants more, even as it is soliciting food aid to the tune of 100 million dollars from the World Food Programme.

While this is the transparent motive of its protest, Ethiopia has tried to invoke international law to argue that the embargo should be targeted at Eritrea alone. Indeed, it has the audacity to claim that the United Nations is repeating history by condemning aggressor and victim alike as did the League of Nations when Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935.

If there is one nation that deserves redress for a historical injustice meted to it at the hand of the United Nations, it is Eritrea. The United Nations imposed a federation between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1952, against the expressed wishes of the Eritrean people. Ethiopia unilaterally abrogated this international instrument to annex Eritrea in 1962. And, Eritrea had to struggle for 30 years to regain its national independence, paying precious sacrifices in the process, while its was ignored by the world body.

But this is history and Eritrea has forgotten and forgiven the historical injustice that it suffered. The energies of the Eritrean Government are accordingly focused on resolving the current crisis with Ethiopia.

What are the origins of this crisis? What has been Ethiopia's record?

Ferocious confrontations - much bigger in scale and intensity than the clashes that occurred in May and June last year - have taken place last week on

the Mereb-Setit and Alitiena-Mereb fronts. Ethiopia has further unleashed attacks on the Burie front on 14 and 15 February, an act that is raising serious questions of its motive, as Addis Ababa does not have territorial claims on this part of Eritrea. In any case, the international community is well aware of the bombing of Adigrat that Ethiopia fabricated - rather ineptly - to prepare a pretext to break the moratorium on air strikes and to justify the large-scale offensive that it launched on 6 February 1999 and has been continuing since. Hence, it has become obvious to the international community, although belatedly, that Ethiopia's first and only option is war. The aggressor country is Ethiopia, which is not only bent on regaining contested territory by force, but also appears to entertain other sinister designs on its neighbour.

In regard to the earlier incidents too, the aggressor was Ethiopia as the following facts illustrate:

Ethiopia used force to occupy the Eritrean village of Adi Murug in Bada in August 1997 and to dismantle the administration there;

Ethiopia violated the international boundary between the two countries by publishing, in October 1997, a new official map incorporating large chunks of Eritrean territory into the Administrative Zone of Tigray;

Ethiopia escalated its encroachments on Eritrean territory in the Badme area, evicting Eritreans from their land and destroying their property;

Ethiopia carried out an unprovoked attack against a small unit of the Eritrean army within Eritrean territory on 6 May 1998, killing four officers and wounding three others. This led to a series of clashes until 12 May 1998.

These are wanton acts of aggression as defined by the relevant articles of the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, as well as the relevant resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly. This is also the reason why Ethiopia has been adamantly resisting a comprehensive investigation of all the events that led to the current crisis.

Ethiopia falsely claims that all third parties without exception that have at one time or another been seized with the crisis have realized that aggression was committed by Eritrea against Ethiopia. If the facilitators had asked Eritrea to withdraw from Badme, it was because they felt that a face-saving formula was vital for the Ethiopian regime which had ineptly cornered itself into a box. Otherwise they were categorical in stating in the document that they were not being judgemental about the origin of the crisis. If the Organization of African Unity has repeated that plea in some varied form, the reason has again been the same. They asked Eritrea to show goodwill because Ethiopia had strenuously claimed that it had been humiliated.

Eritrea has not accepted these arguments because, in reality, it is Eritrea which has been humiliated by Ethiopia through repetitive acts of aggression as well as the perpetration of gross violations of human rights on its citizens who were resident in Ethiopia.

In conclusion, Ethiopia can certainly oppose the call for an arms embargo, but it must honestly tell us the real reason, which is the furtherance of its aggression.